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Older Adults Urged To Get Flu Shots

Because the 2007 flu season is almost here, the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) is encouraging older adults to get influenza (flu) vaccinations. With approximately 132 million doses having been produced, there is expected to be plenty of vaccine to go around this year.

Vaccine manufacturers are now shipping vaccines to clinics and health facilities. Senior centers and other community organizations are encouraged to contact their local health departments to arrange for flu clinics for older adults and their caregivers. Older Americans also should be encouraged to talk to their doctors about receiving the pneumonia vaccine along with a flu shot.

"It is especially important for older adults to be vaccinated, as well as their caregivers and other family members who are in daily contact with them," said Sharon Gire, OSA Director. "They fall into a high risk group."

The flu is a contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. It is characterized by high fever, headache, sore throat, cough and muscle aches. It can be spread through contact with an infected person, and it is contagious as long as five days after symptoms appear. Individuals age 60 and older are more at risk of serious complications from the flu because they are more likely to suffer from chronic lung or heart problems. Studies have shown that flu vaccinations were associated with a 27 percent decrease in the risk of hospitalization from the flu. Further, there was a 48 percent decrease in the risk of death from the flu.

It also appears an increasing number of older adults are being vaccinated. According to the CDC, roughly 60 percent of adults age 65 and older are vaccinated each year. Last year, 69 percent of older Americans, age 65 and older, received the flu vaccine. But this is still below the national goal of 90 percent. The flu usually peaks in February, but it can strike before the start of the flu season in November. The federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend seeking vaccinations in October or November.

Although frail elders are at the highest risk of dying from the flu, a team of researchers from the National Institutes of Health has concluded that the benefits of flu shots for people over the age of 70 are highly exaggerated though some researchers believe that even a partly effective vaccine is better than no vaccine at all.

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